

FCC's Lifeline Proposal Would Bring Affordable Broadband Internet to Low-Income Households

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(WASHINGTON) Today, Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Wheeler and Commissioner Clyburn have announced a Lifeline proposal for consideration by the Commission at its March 31, 2016 meeting. The proposal provides a thoughtful framework for modernizing the federal low-income telecommunications discount program to include affordable broadband Internet service. "Access to the Internet is a necessity, not a luxury, and low-income households need affordable, quality 21st century communications," said National Consumer Law Center attorney Olivia Wein.

The Lifeline program was established in the mid-1980s to connect low-income households to emergency services, jobs, healthcare, teachers, friends, and family through affordable voice phone service. The current Lifeline support is \$9.25 a month. The FCC's proposal would allow Lifeline participants to direct their Lifeline discount toward affordable broadband service.

Access to broadband today is as essential for access to opportunity as electricity was in the last century. For those who can afford broadband service, broadband integration in modern life has been nearly ubiquitous and Internet access has transformed the classroom. As FCC Commissioner Rosenworcel has noted, the "homework gap" is the cruelest part of the digital divide. From access to jobs and healthcare, the harmful effects of digital exclusion increase, especially as more necessities of modern life move online.

"We thank FCC Chairman Wheeler and Commissioner Clyburn for their leadership in modernizing the Lifeline program and Commissioner Rosenworcel for elevating the need to close the "homework gap" for our nation's children," said Wein.

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